

4VAC15-200-30
Game: Rabbits and Hares: Trapping with box traps.

Summary:

The proposal is to limit the translocation of live wild rabbits box trapped in Virginia to within the county of capture in order to reduce the risk of spreading Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Serotype 2 throughout the Commonwealth.

Proposed language of amendment:

4VAC15-200-30. Trapping with box traps.

It shall be lawful to trap rabbits with box traps from October 15 through January 31, both dates inclusive; provided, that no traps shall be set on the lands of another without written permission; provided further, that it shall be lawful to live-trap rabbits and transport them only within their county of capture, for release or restocking purposes in Virginia at any time, provided they are not released onto the lands of another without permission.

Rationale:

Limiting the translocation of wild rabbits is an important preventative measure intended to reduce the risk of spreading Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Serotype 2 (RHDV2) across the Commonwealth. Live animal movement is believed to be the most efficient way to spread this highly infectious and lethal virus long distances. RHDV2 affects all rabbit, hare, and pika species, and spreads easily and rapidly through rabbit populations. Over 80% of infected rabbits may die from it, potentially causing severe local or landscape-level rabbit population declines. While it is not known for certain whether RHDV2 will spread across the United States to Virginia, the likelihood is high based upon the documented rapid spread of the disease across both Europe and Australia. To protect Virginia's rabbit species for all citizens, including Virginia rabbit hunters and rabbit dog enthusiasts, steps to limit the translocation of wild captured rabbits are prudent. The DWR RHDV2 Management Plan outlines several pathways to minimize the risk of RHDV2 introduction and spread in Virginia, including development of an RHDV2 outreach campaign, restricted importation of potentially infectious non-consumable parts of rabbits that originate from outside Virginia, elimination of the disposal of potentially infectious leftover carcass parts on the landscape in Virginia, and restricted translocation of live wild rabbits within Virginia. Because it is possible that the disease could be present in Virginia and remain undetected for some time, the inadvertent spread of RHDV2 across the Commonwealth may be avoided by limiting the translocation of potentially infected live wild rabbits.